



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

From Young People to Young Citizens: The Emergence of a Revolutionary Youth in France, 1788-1790

Author(s): Nicolas Déplanche

Source: *Journal of Social History*, Fall 2011, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Fall 2011), pp. 225-237

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41678824>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Social History*

JSTOR

From Young People to Young Citizens: The Emergence of a Revolutionary Youth in France, 1788-1790

Co-Winner of the 2010 JSH Student Essay Competition

A striking feature of the French Revolution of 1789 was the relative youth of its main protagonists. Men such as Robespierre, Danton and Brissot indeed became among the most influential and charismatic leaders of the Revolution during their thirties, which suggests an intimate connection between their generation and the revolutionary dynamic. As Timothy Tackett showed, the making of this revolutionary body can be in part explained by the “intense pedagogical experience”¹ of the National Constituent Assembly's early moments. But what is yet to be explained is how this *passion révolutionnaire* also reached the younger French generations, those who were excluded from the rights of citizenship because of their age but who were nonetheless eager to engage in what was already perceived as a great historical event. Historians have usually tackled this issue with the underlying assumption that the politicization of youth had been a top-down process, occurring rather late in the Revolution as the advent of the Republic and increasing warfare created the need for a state-based mobilization of young generations. Hence, this body of literature has successfully identified a number of pedagogical channels put in place by the revolutionary power since 1792 to shape France's youth to the needs of the Revolution. Historians working on the reform of public instruction have shown that education was a major concern for the revolutionaries since 1789, but that they remained unable to agree on a concrete plan before 1793.² Other have stressed the importance of alternative means of political education, such as the diffusion of printed material

Author's note: An earlier version of this paper was written in Spring 2009 for a research seminar at the University of California, Irvine. I would like to thank my doctoral thesis advisor Timothy Tackett and my research seminar professor David Igler for their advice and support. The ideas, hypotheses and perspectives of research that I have exposed here are the starting point of an ongoing dissertation project on youth in the French Revolution. Address correspondence to Nicolas Déplanche, Department of History, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697.

Journal of Social History vol. 45 no. 1 (2011), pp. 225–237
doi:10.1093/jsh/shr014

© The Author 2011. Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.
For permissions, please e-mail: journals.permissions@oup.com.

and the making of heroic figures, a process that started in 1792 and culminated in 1794 with an explosion of the number of publications destined for youth.³

These works have successfully shown how youth became an inherent part of the symbolic order of the First Republic and explored the various pedagogical strategies used by the revolutionary state to exploit this cultural resource. However, none of these works addresses the early politicization and participation of youth in the revolutionary process, a phenomenon that remains largely unexplained. Indeed, the focus on state strategies to shape republican youth from 1792 has disregarded the fact that immediately after the fall of the Bastille, young men and women, among them children, formed political associations and military bodies, gathered in assemblies, and sent addresses and delegations to Paris to ensure the members of the National Constituent Assembly of their entire support. How could the youth of 1789 become politicized so quickly?

This article will address this question by looking at the mobilization of those who called themselves the “young people of Brittany” from the months prior to the Revolution until it became the movement of the “young citizens of Brittany and Anjou” in early 1790. It will argue that the crisis that preceded the Revolution in Brittany had a dramatic impact on the political consciousness of young people and shaped the way they would interact with the revolutionary state in the following years. Moreover, it will show that the generational position that had been an impediment to youth's political existence during the Old Regime quickly became a source of legitimacy and confidence in the months that preceded the Revolution.

The main source base for this article consists of eight pamphlets published between 1789 and 1790 by the youth movement in Western France.⁴ Hence, a focus on this region allows us to overcome the difficulty of finding sources written by young people, a problem experienced by most historians working on youth and childhood in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.⁵ During their mobilization of 1789 and 1790 the young people of Brittany and Anjou published several pamphlets to proclaim their existence as a political group and declare their allegiance to the Third Estate and later to the Revolution. Also recorded in these documents are the details of their organization: the names of its members, how they voted, chose leaders, establish contact with other groups and ensured order in their own ranks. It is difficult at this point to establish the extent to which these specific pamphlets were diffused and read. For one thing, they were part of a larger corpus of political pamphlets and newspapers commenting on the conflict between the Third and the nobility in early 1789, publications that were as a whole extremely popular in Rennes.⁶ What we know for sure about youth's pamphlets is that they were sufficiently notorious and diffused on the national level to be formally condemned by the Parlement of Paris before the outbreak of the Revolution. In this regard, it will be necessary to read these documents in tandem with the reactions of political authorities found in printed sources on the Parlement of Brittany and Paris.⁷

The role of young people of Brittany and Anjou in the crisis of the Provincial Estates held in Rennes in 1788-1789 has already been detailed in local monographs. Historians working on this region of France have already studied their involvement during the crisis of the Provincial Estates held in Rennes in 1788-1789.⁸ The most significant piece written on the subject is undoubtedly the doctoral thesis of Roger Dupuy on the formation the national

guard. One of the main arguments of Dupuy is that the youth movement gave the initial impulsion to the formation of a national militia in the department of Ille-et-Vilaine (part of the former province of Brittany), whose primary objectives would be to defend the Nation against the aristocracy and popular unrest. Central to this argument is the idea that the radical youth movement of Brittany was soon co-opted by an adult and moderate leadership of the revolutionary bourgeoisie.⁹ Essential as it may be to understand how early patterns of revolutionary thought and action crystalized in 1789, this focus on co-optation has overlooked the original character of young people's mobilization, the claim to belong to a specific class of political actors that was not defined by social origins, profession, ethnicity or gender, but rather by its generational position. Contrary to the young nobles who also defended their order when the political conflict turned into a bloody battle in the streets of Rennes but who never constituted a group of their own,¹⁰ these young members of the Third Estate felt entitled to assemble in public, deliberate, publish pamphlets and form military bodies on the basis of their youthful status, a phenomenon that deserves explanation.

Of course we cannot deny that those "young people" had a fairly precise social definition: the "youth" of Brittany and Anjou as an active group meant above all young men originating in the professional bourgeoisie, mostly law students aged between 18 and 25.¹¹ It is tempting to see in the predominance of law students among this group the origins of their radicalism and early political consciousness. As Richard Kagan has shown, during the eighteenth century the faculties of law often complained about problems of indiscipline and violence among their students.¹² Moreover, the outbreak of the Revolution in France has often been explained in part by a saturation of the job market that followed the dramatic augmentation of law graduates in the last decades of the Old Regime.¹³ Was the crisis of the pre-revolution simply an outlet for the professional frustrations that these future lawyers were expecting? Nothing indicates that this was the case. According to Kagan, until the Revolution the recruitment for different positions in the legal professions seems to have increased at a rate fairly similar to the number of law graduates.¹⁴ Furthermore, nothing in their pamphlets suggests that these students were concerned about their professional future or felt in competition with older lawyers already established.

The high concentration of law students in Western France and their predominance in the youth movement is nonetheless crucial on two levels.¹⁵ First, their legal training provided them the rhetorical and organizational skills to lead Brittany and Anjou's youth in the political arena as a cohesive, well articulated and self-confident group, as the form and content of their writings and the procedures of their meetings can testify.¹⁶ Second, the demographic evolution of the student population in the last decades of the eighteenth-century have certainly played a role in the making of a generational consciousness for youth. During this period, students in the faculties of Law were gradually limited to a cohort aged between 18 and 25, a consequence of the standardization of the legal training and education system as a whole.¹⁷ Giving this fact, it is not surprising that the law students of Brittany and Anjou would think of themselves as a distinct group defined by their generational position and that they would assume the leadership of a youth movement in Western France. However, the socio-professional composition of Brittany and Anjou's youth movement cannot

by itself explain their early inclination toward revolutionary politics: other parts of the Kingdom had a similar population of law students, but only in Western France did they become a prominent group during the pre-revolution. Hence, to understand their mobilization it is crucial to look at the particular context of pre-revolutionary Brittany and at the succession of events leading to the formation of a youth coalition.

The tensions between the Third Estate and privileged orders of France on the eve of the Revolution were particularly acute in the province of Brittany, where a powerful and intransigent nobility remained profoundly hostile to the demands of the Third.¹⁸ When the Provincial Estates assembled in Rennes in December 1788, the refusal of the nobility to consider the main claims of the Third - namely the augmentation of their number and the vote by head - led the province into a political cul-de-sac. In order to alleviate the crisis, the King ordered a temporary suspension of the session, a decision that was seen by the privileged orders as being favorable to the Third. To protest against what they saw as a threat to their social and political hegemony, the nobility and upper-clergy swore on January 8 1789 to oppose any attempts to modify the constitution of the Estates of Brittany. In this context, the representatives of the Third Estate found their most valuable ally in the association of law students of Rennes. Indeed, already in late December 1788, the law students had sent a delegation to the Provincial Estates to declare their support for the Third and to confront the privileged orders in the name of the young people of Rennes, Nantes and Saint-Malo.¹⁹ But it was a month later, during what was remembered as the *journées des bricoles* of January 26 and 27, that the law students transformed their commitment into action, as they became the main protagonists of one of the first revolutionary moments of 1789, several months before the fall of the Bastille.

The *journées des bricoles*²⁰ started as a battle in the streets of Rennes between law students and a crowd mainly constituted of manservants of the nobility, and eventually turned into a violent fight opposing young people of the Third and the nobles themselves. On the morning of January 26, members of the nobility gathered and harangued a crowd on the *champs Montmorin*, in the center of Rennes, in the hope of turning the people of the city against the Third.²¹ The battle began when the crowd of manservants later encountered a group of law students at the *Café de l'union*, and went on in the streets of Rennes for many hours. Although no one was killed, this skirmish set the background for what would happen the next day. Around four o'clock in the afternoon on January 27, a young artisan was assaulted by two manservants for having fought on the side of the law students the day before. Stabbed in the hand, he reached the students at the *café de l'union*, who quickly assembled in front of the *Palais de justice* and threatened to lynch the nobleman Vignon, held responsible for the incidents of the previous day. The battle then resumed, but this time with more intensity. In response to this escalation of violence, the law students circulated a call for help among the youth of the neighboring cities. Immediately after the fight began, they sent an emissary bearing the nickname *Omnes Omnibus*²² to request the assistance of the young people of Nantes, about sixty miles south of Rennes. After a brief speech by *Omnes Omnibus*, the young Nantais who had assembled in the *Hôtel de la Bourse* on January 28th decided to make common cause with the youth of Rennes. The content of their

deliberation shows that the struggle of the law students was understood as part of this larger contention between the Third and the nobility, in which youth of all professions, and not only law students, felt like they had a decisive role to play. As the youth of Nantes would claim in their *Protestation*, "the insurrection for liberty and equality being in the interest of every real citizen of the Third, they must support it with all their might by an unshakable and indivisible adhesion, but especially the young people, fortunate to be born late enough so they can hope to enjoy, under a beloved King, the fruits of Eighteenth-Century philosophy."²³ After having proclaimed their allegiance to the Third, the young Nantais decided to assist the Rennais in the following terms: "we the undersigned Young People of all profession, have decided to leave in sufficient numbers to overpower the fanatic aristocrats' vile executioners and ask reparation for the offense made in Rennes from those who must dispense justice."²⁴

The youth of Nantes were not the only ones to respond with such enthusiasm to the call for help made by the Rennais. In Saint-Malo, an assembly of young people declared on the same day that a sufficient number of them would "leave immediately for Rennes and oppose the force of virtue and the courage of patriotism against the base fury of the traitors who were excited by a number of Gentlemen,"²⁵ a reaction that would be followed a few days later by the law students of Angers.²⁶ In Rennes, the rumor of this massive mobilization was enough to discourage the nobility from prolonging the fight against the young people of the Third. On January 29, three days after the beginning of the fight and before the first troop of young people had even reached the city, the young Rennais and the nobility agreed on a "peace treaty" to stop the violence and restore order. However, the cessation of hostilities did not prevent this youthful coalition of Brittany and Anjou from gathering in Rennes to affirm their fraternal bonds and manifest their support to the Third. From February 1st to 6th, they held an assembly at Rennes' faculty of Law in which many delegations of young people from Brittany and Anjou would pledge mutual assistance and fidelity to the nation and the King, a ritual that would become a distinctive feature of the Revolution in the coming year and culminate in the great federation festival of July 14, 1790.²⁷

Hence, the intense polarization of Brittany's politics since 1788 and the aggravation of tensions by the nobility in January 1789 stand as the most significant factors explaining why this region of France rather than another witnessed the emergence of an active youth movement. But the presence of a large population of law students was also crucial to initiate and organize this mobilization. According to Roger Dupuy, this involvement of youth in Brittany's pre-revolutionary crisis was a success in three respects: psychologically, they had gained confidence by realizing they could counteract the maneuvers of the nobility; politically, they had bound together the law students and the young people of all professions in support of the Third Estate; militarily, they were now united in a patriotic federation and constituted a powerful tactical force.²⁸ But it is also essential to place this brief episode on a broader time frame to understand the impact of the pre-revolutionary crisis on the political and generational consciousness of youth.

The involvement of youth during the *journées des bricoles* takes on deeper significance if we consider the creation of the Association of law students of Rennes in 1756, rather than the crisis of the pre-revolution, as the first step of

Brittany's youth on France's political stage. Since its creation, the very existence of this Association was problematic for the Parlement of Brittany, who would hardly tolerate the claims of the law students to assemble in public and deliberate just like a standard political body. Indeed, a striking feature of the Association was that contrary to other associations of students, its purpose went beyond the organization of festivals,²⁹ a role that was traditionally devoted to youth as a socially acceptable and limited occasion to act publicly during the Old Regime.³⁰ From the outset, the Association had a political function: its *raison d'être* was "to bind the young people together and defend their privileges."³¹ Those privileges were often trivial, the most important being the free admission of 13 students at the different spectacles of the city.³² But because of its organization and internal functioning, the Association was seen by the Parlement as constituting a distinct political body, a situation even more unacceptable since it was composed of young students. In the context of eighteenth-century France, the reaction of the Parlement of Brittany was hardly surprising. Indeed, during this period great effort was devoted to the making of clear boundaries between youth and adulthood, not only through the standardization of collegial education but also by the gradual raise of the minimal age to join the army, swear an oath or take religious vows.³³ In 1767, the Association was repressed by the Parlement who ordered the cessation of its activities while emphasizing its transgressive nature. In the session of January 31st 1767, the *avocat général du Roi* spoke "to denounce the ongoing abuses of the last years, not of the Faculty of Law but of the young students of this Faculty. [...] In 1756, they believed that they could form a political body and for the first time they nominated a clerk, they opened a register in which they decided to write down the result of the deliberations they would decide by a plurality of votes [...]. The court cannot tolerate such an enterprise, no citizen having the right to form a body [...], and even less young students under the rules and statutes of the Faculty."³⁴

This firm position of the parliamentary magistrates was reconsidered two years later and the Association was granted the right to assemble and hold its register again, on the condition that "they would not form a distinct political body."³⁵ But following the reform of parliamentary powers orchestrated by Maupeou in 1771, a new composition of the Parlement of Brittany reaffirmed the edict of 1767 suppressing the activities of the Association, "ordering the clerk or any other depositary of the Register of the law students' deliberations to hand it over, [...] [and] prohibiting them to open another register or to assemble for any other purposes than those concerning their studies."³⁶ The students submitted the register but did not give up the struggle, and when the previous Parlement was reinstated in 1774, they requested that "their old Register be given back to them, [and that they] have permission to keep a register of their elections [and] of their deliberations [...],"³⁷ to which the parliamentary magistrates agreed. However, the rights secured by the law students of Rennes after eight years of political and judiciary protests would not render their presence on the public sphere less problematic. To the contrary, when their involvement in the crisis of the pre-revolution and the *journées des bricoles* propelled them to the forefront of Brittany's political scene, the law students and other young people who had joined them would encounter the same denial of their political agency,

this time by the Parlement of Paris. However, their claim would acquire a whole new significance in the context of pre-revolutionary France.

On the morning of March 6, 1789 the Parlement of Paris assembled to condemn eight of the pamphlets published by the law students and young people of Brittany related to the *journées des bricoles* and its immediate consequences. Indeed, in the eyes of the parliamentary magistrates the very fact that these pamphlets were written by a coalition of young people claiming to be the defenders of the nation's liberty indicated nothing else than the unfolding of a hideous conspiracy against the public good. "By what instigation," asked the lawyer Antoine-Louis Séguier, "did it happen that the youth of Rennes, Nantes, Lorient, Brest and Saint-Malo assembled in these cities and then acted in concert ? [...] Who persuaded them to form a public association?"³⁸ The underlying assumption of Séguier was that this public association could hardly be the fact of the young people alone: for the parliamentarian, an autonomous political body constituted by Brittany's youth was simply unthinkable.

Yet, this coalition of young people had effectively stepped into the political arena and intimidated the nobility of the province, a fact that Séguier could not ignore. The manner in which he tried to undercut the legitimacy of the young Bretons' claims would strongly echo the position of the Parlement of Brittany toward the Association in 1767 and 1772, through the complete denial of youth's access to politics. Introducing the young people's pamphlets to his colleagues, Séguier first emphasized the anomalous character of law students and young people that "suddenly assembled in a corporation, establishing a legal body, forming an assembly and taking deliberations."³⁹ But in reality, argued Séguier, this phenomenon was nothing more than a parody made by an "inconsiderate youth all the more prompt to make decisions that they ignore the true principles."⁴⁰ Youth's lack of instruction in the "true principles" of public life was crucial in Séguier's denunciation: in the final analysis, they had intruded into the political world of adults by "borrowing the language and usual forms of edicts from the sovereign courts"⁴¹ in order to make their own claims. In the end the Parliament of Paris would condemn the pamphlets of the young people of Brittany without considering their substance. Thus, it was not the content of their claims that was problematic, it was their very pretension of making them.

Séguier had seen right in one way: under the leadership of law students, the coalition of Brittany's youth had made every effort possible to engage in the crisis of the pre-revolution by using the language and forms of political action. Their support of the Third Estate was justified not only by an egalitarian rhetoric claiming "the absolute reestablishment of the eternal and imprescriptible principles of social justice [...]," but also by a systematic pledge of submission to the King's authority, a ruler "more father than king, who uses the supreme power devoted to him only to ensure the rights and freedom of humanity [...]."⁴² Moreover, they had organized their movement in a way that ensured discipline, order and coordination. When the young people of Nantes decided on January 28 to send a large delegation to assist Rennes' youth during the *journées des bricoles*, they immediately designated a council of fifteen leaders who would be in charge of organizing and policing the contingent, as well as six chief correspondents who would keep the remaining young people of Nantes well informed. And to maintain order in their ranks as they moved toward Rennes, the council of fifteen had decreed a series of strict rules, including the absolute

interdiction "to show off their firearms [...] or unload them on the road [...]," which "after being unanimously accepted, would have the force of law among [them]."⁴³ As Séguier had pointed out with derision and contempt in the Parlement of Paris on the morning of March 6, 1789, the young people of Brittany had indeed carefully framed their discourse and actions to gain political credibility.

What Séguier did not realize, or perhaps was not willing to acknowledge, was that the King's decision to call the Estates General in August 1788 had given a whole new significance the political consciousness of youth. For the first time since 1614, the three orders of the Kingdom would assemble in Versailles to counsel the King on the major issues that France confronted. Above all, the Estates General of 1789 would be an occasion to operate a great regeneration of French society, a unique moment of reflection on the future of the Kingdom: for almost a year, in every corner of France people would deliberate on the problems they experienced and on possible solutions. The young people of Western France did not fail to see how this process had suddenly created political space for them. Because they represented the future generations of a Kingdom about to be reformed, they now had the conviction of being the first concerned by this extraordinary event set in motion by Louis XVI, which the privileged orders now threatened to sabotage. This generational consciousness was crucial in their engagement in the struggle of the pre-revolution, as the law students of Angers claimed with clarity in their assembly of February 3, 1789: "we, the young people, have more than any other class interest in preventing the reestablishment of the feudal tyranny and the seizure of the Monarchy by an aristocratic faction, since we will live with the consequences in this life that we are just beginning."⁴⁴ Hence, no matter what the Parlement of Paris decreed, the young people of the West now thought of themselves as being rightfully on the center stage of France's politics. When the Revolution began just a few months later, this sudden shift in youth's political significance would quickly become a national issue.

From January 15th to 19th, 1790, the youth of Brittany assembled in Pontivy to take an oath of solidarity and pledge mutual assistance, much like they had done a year before in Rennes after the *journées des bricoles*. But since their first meeting in Rennes in February 1789, the context in which the young people of Brittany and Anjou operated had dramatically changed. The Kingdom was now under the authority of the National Constituent Assembly, a legislative body derived from the Estates General that had set for itself the herculean task of turning France into a constitutional monarchy based on the sovereignty of the Nation, equality before the Law, and the benevolence of the King. The proceedings of the five day reunion of Pontivy indicates how these changes impacted the movement of those who now called themselves the "young military citizens".

This second pact of union was the initiative of the young people of Quimper, a small city of the Armorican peninsula situated approximately 130 miles west of Rennes. From the outset, the meeting in Pontivy, the exact halfway point between Rennes and Quimper, was meant as the reaffirmation of the previous pledge of solidarity made in Renne in February 1789. As they stated in the opening of their assembly, it would be the occasion "to consecrate, by an authentic act, the Pact of Union that they had formed last year and to

consolidate, with all their might, the felicitous Constitution that established social equality and liberty in France.”⁴⁵ In fact, the pact of union that the young Bretons and students of Angers had taken in Rennes in February 1789 was not lacking in formality or seriousness, and did not need to be consecrated by a *more authentic* pact of union: it already had “force of Law, on their honor, and engaged all of those who would sign it.”⁴⁶ In addition, the pact of February 1789 had already been formally registered and diffused in the entire province.

On one level, the need to assemble and proceed to another fraternal union can be understood as part of the larger phenomenon of *federation* that embraced the Kingdom soon after the outbreak of the Revolution. This movement consisted of a solemn meeting between municipal militias of the same region in order to constitute a defensive alliance against popular disorders and attempts to reestablish the Old Regime.⁴⁷ For a large part, these defensive alliances were the product of a complex set of apprehensions labelled *great fear* by French historian Georges Lefebvre, that spread in many regions of France between 1789-1790 and engendered riots and the burning of châteaux.⁴⁸ But the federations were also an opportunity to pledge adhesion and fidelity to the new order established by the revolutionary National Assembly, an aspect of this movement that was central in the young citizens' reunion in Pontivy. In this sense, Pontivy was not just a pact between Brittany's and Anjou's youth, it was a pact with the new revolutionary regime. This idea points to the most important change brought about by the Revolution in youth's activism since the crisis of the pre-revolution, which is the nature of their relationship with the political authorities. They were now regarded by both the local and central powers as a legitimate political group and interlocutor.

It is the relationship established during the reunion of Pontivy between youth and the National Constituent Assembly that especially expresses the full measure of this new political status. To be sure, the nature of this relationship was more ambiguous than its rhetoric might suggest at first glance. For one thing, the assembly of young citizens was proclaiming an unconditional submission to the authority of the National Assembly, stating that nothing is “more sacred for [it] than the decrees of the august Senate that reestablished the Nation's rights and consecrated civil liberty and equality in France.”⁴⁹ But at the same time, in the address that they sent to the National Assembly they were using the language of filial subordination to simultaneously evoke and condone the potential autonomy of their movement. Hence, they would try to frame their relationship with the deputies of the National Assembly through the trope of the good and magnanimous father that regards excesses as a normal and benign function of youth⁵⁰: “The ardor of youth and disorderliness of its ideas will earn the indulgence of your goodness; we are asking for it with easiness and freedom, like submissive children speak to their father, their liberator.”⁵¹ On final analysis, youth negotiated its place in the new political order by asserting its submission to the revolutionary leadership while emphasizing “ardor and disorderliness of ideas” as its natural characteristic.

This process of negotiation was not a mere rhetorical exercise. During the reunion of Pontivy, the young citizens received directives from members of the National Assembly to which they complied but under certain conditions. On January 17 1790, the assembly of young citizens received an address from the Breton deputies of the National Assembly, demanding that they refrain from

preventing the former members of the privileged orders from being elected in the local administrative bodies. The young citizens accepted, claiming that if “a spirit of peace led [the Nation] to declare a pardon [...], the Young Citizens of Brittany should feel the same.”⁵² But this submission to the request of the deputies had a price: in return they would ask for the prosecution of the nobles whom they held responsible for the *journée des bricoles*, as well as the condemnation by the National Assembly of the position taken against them by the Parlement of Paris and Louis-Antoine Séguier in march 1789.⁵³ Hence, what this exchange brings to light is the fact that the youth's coalition had gained enough momentum to become a credible interlocutor with the state. At a time when the nation was being redefined on totally new ground, the reunion of Pontivy was the signal that young generations would not remain passive in the process.

Conclusion

During the Eighteenth-Century youth became increasingly separated from adulthood, mainly through the pedagogical revolution of the Enlightenment. This sharper definition of generational identities created the conditions for the emergence of a revolutionary youth in France. From 1788 to 1790, the provinces of Brittany and Anjou witnessed the apparition of a new category of political actors, defining themselves above all on generational terms and finding their legitimacy in the spirit of regeneration that occurred with the calling of the Estates General. No single factor can explain why youth appeared as a political force in this region of France rather than elsewhere in the Kingdom. There is no doubt that the presence of a large population of law students was crucial for organizing and leading the movement, but it was only when the nobility of Brittany radicalized the political atmosphere that this movement would take form. Future research will have to focus on other regions of France with a similar student population in order to validate or revise this argument.

Nonetheless the youth movement in Western France was not only a regional phenomenon: in 1790, they established a dialogue with the National Constituent Assembly and engaged in a process of negotiation in the name of all young people. At a time when the revolutionary leadership was forging the new constitution of the Kingdom, the significance of this dynamic cannot be overstated. What the case of Brittany and Anjou's youth movement suggests is that the place devoted to youth in the new constitutional order—especially their access to citizenship through the institution of the National Guard—was not simply decreed by the State, but was rather the result of intergenerational dialogue and negotiation. If this hypothesis is confirmed by a close examination of the debates of the National Assembly, it would shed a different light on the efforts made two years later under the First Republic to shape youth according to the needs of the state.

Endnotes

1. Timothy Tackett, “Étude sérielle de la psychologie révolutionnaire: la correspondance des députés des Assemblées nationales (1789-1794),” in *Colloque Archives épistolaires et*

Histoire, ed. Mireille Bossis and Lucia Bergamasco (Paris, 2007), 179. Tackett elaborates this idea in *Becoming a Revolutionary: the Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (University Park, 2006 [1996]).

2. See Dominique Julia, *Les trois couleurs du tableau noir: la Révolution* (Paris, 1981); Robert R. Palmer. *The Improvement of Humanity* (Princeton, 1985); Bronislaw Baczo, "Instruction publique," in *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française, Institutions et créations*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Paris, 1992), 275-297.

3. On the diffusion of the *revolutionary catechisms*, see Penny Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature, vol.1: 1600-1830* (New-York, 2008); Penny Brown, "Children of the Revolution: the Making of Young Citizens," *Modern and Contemporary France* 2 (2006): 205-220; Bruno Durruty, "Les auteurs des catéchismes révolutionnaires (1789-1799)," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 283 (1991): 1-18; Jean Hébrard, "La Révolution expliquée aux enfants: les catéchismes de l'an II," in *L'enfant, la famille et la Révolution française*, ed. Marie-Françoise Lévy (Paris, 1990), 171-192. On the making of heroic figures as a mean of political education, see Carlo Pancera, "Léonard Bourdon (1754-1807), Editor of the 'Collection of Heroic and Civic Actions of French Republicans,'" *History of European Ideas* 1 (1992): 13-33; Raymonde Monnier, "Le culte de Bara en l'an II," in *Joseph Bara (1779-1793): pour le deuxième centenaire de sa naissance* (Paris, 1981), 37-61.

4. Four pamphlets published at the same period could not be accessed for the purpose of this article. Further research will have to include: *Discours des commissaires des étudiants en droit et jeunes citoyens de Bretagne, en présentant leur arrêté au Commandant de la Province*, 1789; *Arrêté des membres de la bazoche de la ville d'Anger*, n.d; *À messieurs les jeunes gens de Nantes: à leur retour de Rennes le 9 février 1789; Délibérations, mémoire à consulter pour les étudiants en droit, et jeunes citoyens de Rennes*. According to the title of these pamphlets, their content would probably help to present a more detailed and precise version of the events described in the following pages. See the bibliography for the list of sources used in this article.

5. Jean-Claude Caron, "Young People in School: Middle and High School Students in France and Europe," in *A History of Young People in the West, vol. 2: From Stormy Revolution to Modern Time*, ed. Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt (Cambridge, Mass., 1997 [1994]), 118. The sources written by youth for this period usually consists in diaries, letters or schoolwork, which speak to the issue of political consciousness only to a certain extent. For a discussion of the usability of these egodocuments, see Rudolph Dekker, *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum, 2002), 7-20; and *Childhood, Memory and Autobiography in Holland from the Golden Age to Romanticism* (New-York, 1999).

6. Barthélémy Pocquet, *Les origines de la Révolution en Bretagne*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1885), 223.

7. These were found in Hippolyte Monin, *L'État de Paris en 1789. Étude et documents sur l'Ancien Régime à Paris* (Paris, 1889) and Léon de la Sicotière, *L'Association des étudiants en droit de Rennes avant 1790* (Nantes, 1883).

8. See especially the remarkable doctoral thesis of Roger Dupuy, *La Garde Nationale et les débuts de la révolution en Ille-et-Vilaine (1789 - mars 1793)* (Paris, 1972) and Pocquet, *Les origines ...*

9. See especially the chapter 3, "Formation et première organisation de la Milice Nationale de Rennes," in Dupuy, *La Garde Nationale ...*, 68-90.

10. A moving depiction of this conflict from the point of view of a young noble can be found in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* of Chateaubriand.

11. Dupuy, *La Garde Nationale ...*, 63; and Roger Dupuy, *Aux origines idéologiques de la Révolution, journaux et pamphlets à Rennes (1788-1789)* (Rennes, 2000), 190.
12. Richard Kegan, "Law Students and Legal Careers in Eighteenth-Century France," *Past and Present* 68 (1975): 41.
13. Roger Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution française* (Paris, 2000 [1990]), 266-273.
14. Kegan, "Law Students ...", 65.
15. The high number of law students in this region is illustrated by a map in Kegan, "Law Student ...", 46.
16. The most striking example comes from their meeting of Pontivy in January 1790, where they imitated the procedures of the Estates and National Assembly to verify the credentials of their members. See *Procès-verbal des séances tenues par les Jeunes-Citoyens de Bretagne et d'Anjou, extraordinairement assemblés en la ville de Pontivy, le 15 janvier 1790*, (Paris, 1790), 2-8.
17. Kegan, "Law Students ...", 45. Kegan also notes that if the students over 25 became rare in faculties of Law by the end of the eighteenth-century, there was a fifth of the students who would receive permission to be admitted in the faculty before the age of 18.
18. See Pocquet, *Les origines ...*, vol. 2, 181-221.
19. *Le Héraut de la Nation*, n.4, in *Aux origines idéologiques de la Révolution, journaux et pamphlets à Rennes (1788-1789)*, ed. Roger Dupuy (Rennes, 2000), 119-124.
20. The term "*bricoles* " refers to the leather straps used by the manservants of the nobility to carry heavy charges, and that would eventually be used to beat the law students on January 26.
21. In order to do so, the nobles exploited the anxieties about the price of bread and food shortages that were widespread among the people of Rennes since the food riots of septembre 1788. See Pocquet, *Les origines ...*, vol. 2, 1-52.
22. According to Alfred Lescadieu, the origins of the pseudonym *Omnes Omnibus* goes back to 1784, when this young men named Omnes received a medal from the King after having heroically rescued two persons drowning in a Parisian river. On the medal was the inscription *Omnes Omnibus* [Omnes for all]. See Alfred Lescadieu, *Histoire de la ville de Nantes*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1836), 29. In order to prove his courage and patriotism, Omnes Omnibus introduced himself to the assembly of the young people of Nantes by recalling this heroic episode. See *Discours prononcé à l'Hôtel de la Bourse, dans l'Assemblée des Jeunes-Gens de Nantes, par M. Omnes-Omnibus, député des Jeunes-Gens de Rennes, le 28 janvier 1789*, 4.
23. *Protestation et arrêté des Jeunes-Gens de Nantes du 28 janvier 1789*, 6-7.
24. *Protestation et arrêté des Jeunes-Gens de Nantes du 28 janvier 1789*, 7.
25. *Protestation et arrêté des jeunes-gens de Saint-Malo, 28 janvier 1789*, 7.
26. *Protestation et arrêté de MM. les étudiants en droit de la ville d'Angers, 3 février 1789*.
27. *Procès-verbal des séances du Procès-verbal des séances du Tiers-État de Bretagne [...] suivi du Pacte d'Union passé entre les Jeunes Gens de la Province de Bretagne*, 45-46.
28. Dupuy, *La Garde Nationale ...*, 67.
29. Léon de La Sicotière, *L'Association des étudiants en droit de Rennes avant 1790* (Nantes, 1883), 14.

30. See Daniel Fabre, "Doing youth in the Village", in *A History of Young People ...*, ed. Levi and Schmitt, 37-65.
31. De la Sicotière, *L'Association ...*, 14.
32. La Sicotière, *L'Association ...*, 14.
33. See Keith Thomas, *Age and Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1976), 19-25, cited in Sabina Loriga, "The Military Experience", in *A History of Young People ...*, ed. Levi and Schmitt, 18.
34. *Registres secrets*, 31 janvier 1767, in La Sicotière, *L'Association ...*, 21.
35. La Sicotière, *L'Association ...*, 25.
36. *Registres secrets*, 22 août 1772, in La Sicotière, *L'Association ...*, 28.
37. *Requête présentée au Parlement de Bretagne par les Étudiants des Facultés des Droits de la ville de Rennes*, 25 janvier 1775, in La Sicotière, *L'Association ...*, 44.
38. *Séance du Parlement de Paris*, 6 mars 1789, in Hippolyte Monin, *L'État de Paris en 1789. Étude et documents sur l'Ancien Régime à Paris* (Paris, 1889), 238.
39. *Séance du Parlement de Paris*, 6 mars 1789, in Monin, *L'État de Paris ...*, 233.
40. *Séance du Parlement de Paris*, 6 mars 1789, in Monin, *L'État de Paris ...*, 233.
41. *Séance du Parlement de Paris*, 6 mars 1789, in Monin, *L'État de Paris ...*, 233.
42. *Protestation et arrêté des jeunes-gens de Saint-Malo*, 28 janvier 1789, 5-6.
43. *Arrêté des commissaires*, Nozai 30 janvier 1789, in *Journal de route*, 7-8.
44. *Protestation et arrêté des étudiants en droit de la ville d'Angers du 3 février 1789*, 3.
45. *Procès-verbal des séances tenues par les Jeunes-Citoyens de Bretagne et d'Anjou, extraordinairement assemblés en la ville de Pontivy, le 15 janvier 1790* (Paris, 1790), 3.
46. *Procès-verbal des séances du Tiers-État de Bretagne des 14,15,16,17,18,19,20 et 21 février dernier, [...] suivi du Pacte d'Union passé entre les Jeunes Gens de la Province de Bretagne*, 46.
47. Mona Ozouf, "Fédération," in *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française, vol.1 (événements)*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Paris, 1992), 185. The federations of 1789-1790 must not be confused with the federalism of 1793, which corresponds to the military uprising of several départements against the central government that followed the Girondins' expulsion from the National Convention.
48. See Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (New-York, 1973 [1932]).
49. *Procès-verbal des séances tenues par les Jeunes-Citoyens de Bretagne et d'Anjou ...*, 14.
50. See Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1992), 17-52.
51. *Adresse à l'Assemblée nationale*, in *Procès-verbal des séances tenues par les Jeunes-Citoyens de Bretagne et d'Anjou ...*, 32.
52. *Procès-verbal des séances tenues par les Jeunes-Citoyens de Bretagne et d'Anjou ...*, 14.
53. À MM. les députés de Bretagne et d'Anjou, à l'Assemblée nationale, in *Procès-verbal des séances tenues par les Jeunes-Citoyens de Bretagne et d'Anjou ...*, 40-1.